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ABSTRACT

Some of the major problems of the emerging African nations are examined in this paper. An attempt is made to define the role communication can play in helping to solve these problems and to lead these nations toward the goals of national integration and political development. A 25-item bibliography is included in the document. (TO)

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COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EMERGING AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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by

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Communication and Political Development in the Emerging African Countries

Before getting into the development of the above theme, it is necessary for me to state what I think communication, and political development mean and why I use the adjective "emerging" to modify African countries. This is necessary because I have found out that ~~many~~ people understand communication to mean various things, and see this essential human process as "something" rather than a unique process.

Communication is not something someone does to somebody. It is not something somebody does with someone; nor is it exactly the talking to or with somebody. Rather communication should be perceived and/or realized as what people take into account and are susceptible to and the way they take these things into account and become susceptible to them. It becomes a mass concept when a group or an epistemic community, or say society takes something into account towards a concerted goal. As Thayer puts it:

> Communication may...be conceived of as the dynamic process underlying the existence, growth, change the behavior of all living systems--the individual or organization. [It] can be understood as that indispensable function of people and organizations through which the organization or organism relates to its environment, and relates its parts and its internal processes one to another.[1]

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[1] Thayer, Communication and Communication System Homewood, Illinois, p.17.

The basis of a genuine communication process is the ability of individuals to talk to themselves. Communication involves the sum total of our recognition of our reality process, whether these be conceptual, perceptual and/or interactional. Through this process, men construe and construct their own world, fix the boundaries of their ever evolving realities and perceive them as such or not. It is in this light that communication becomes a mass concept although the concept of "mass" in communication is, in my own opinion, always erroneously placed on the media only, rather than include the people using the media. The mass in communication largely refers to the individuals involving themselves in the process and using the media they have made available to themselves as some physical tangibles for the visible articulation of an otherwise invisible but primary process of human existence and interaction.

Communication, if envisaged as enunciated above, and in its broadest term, is not everything. We feel nothing, say nothing, do nothing that we have not taken-into-account and become susceptible to. Life for all men is a world of their own constructs--their take-into-accountabilities and susceptibilities.[2] Therefore within our communicational limits, we construe and construct our real world, we make

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[2]Thayer uses these phrases in his book Communication and Communication System.

and/or create our perceptual and conceptual realities and ideals. Politics is one of our construed and constructed ideals.

The concept of political development cannot therefore be looked upon as one existing on its own outside the world of communication. Political development, in my own opinion, is a development within an epistemic community (in this case nations of Africa) of a sense of national take-into-accountabilities and susceptibilities that will put the interest of all the individuals in the community, and the community itself as a supra-epistemic body, above everything else politically and above the interest of other existing epistemic units or communities outside it.

To further explain what political development is, it is necessary to say what it is not. Political development is not the adoption or creation of an ideology. It is not the election of politicians to the houses of representatives, assemblies and to the Senates. It is not the election campaigns and the expenditure of money involved in this process of exercising the so called concept of parliamentary democracy. Political development does not even mean politial independence since a nation may achieve the popularly known status of political independence without being politically developed. Nor does political development mean the recognition of a country by other countries, or its admission thereof into the United Nations. Rather, the concept of political

development may include all of the above and more.

Political development involves the fashioning out and practice in the exercise of politics towards the goals of national integration, economic and social well-being of a nation and all its people. It includes the abilities and capabilities of a nation to develop its resources and tap those available without over-reliance on the technical know-how of others for too long a time. It is, broadly speaking, the ability of a nation to manage its own affairs with a maximum amount of internal cohesion and external balance. Within this frame work of political development, most, if not all African countries are in fact, hard put to make. It is in this light that I describe these African countries as emerging. Most of them have seen the handwriting on the walls and are emerging from the umbra of internal and international political development to its penumbraic region. This emergence is fraught with problems that are unique to these African nations. Problems that were not experienced by most other nations of the world during their comparable period of emergence. We may then examine some of these problems, at least some of the major ones, and try to define what role communication can play in helping solve these problems, and helping lead these nations towards the goals of national integration and political development.

Slavery vs. Humanism

One of the basic problems of communication and political development in Africa is the existence, within the experiential social fabric of these nations, of two antagonistic concepts and practices--slavery and humanism. It may be impossible for people to see the relationship between slavery and communication, but if my defination of communication as what people take-into-account and are susceptible to is borne in mind then some reasonable relationship may be seen. Africa was the home of most slaves. It still is. Africans were not only sold out into slavery outside their own homes but were and are in some instances still enslaved in their own homes. Slave labor which could actually be called human exploitation was the basic fuel that led to the industrial and subsequent technological revolutions. Thus in the Americas, West Indies, and many parts of Western Europe, African slaves were the initial bull-dozers, catapillars, and tractors. They were, to the present humanistically outspoken Europeans, the beasts of burden, tools to be used that were used. It was not until Africans were utmostly exploited to their limits of human physical and mental abilities and used to exhaustion, the products of their labor adequately accumulated as wealth that could stimulate and did stiumulate new capital and new wealth for their masters, that conditions in those countries

were ripe enough for industrial and mercantile revolutions. The African slaves had produced, in most cases, enough goods to meet the local demands, as well as excesses for export. Trade became a necessary and useful product of human exploitation for material built up. It also served as the founding stone of international politics and relations. Such experiences live with them.

The situation today in these emerging African countries is different. These emerging or developing African nations,as they are often called, find themselves presently at a fix. They have been enslaved although they are characteristically humanistic. They are also emerging at a time when there are international conventions prohibiting even their use of themselves to stimulate the wealth and national development of their countries. They come into being when industrial disputes get rewarded by increases in remuneration instead of arbitrary execution or merciless thrashing. What was the basic step for economic and national development of the now developed or industrial nations of the world must now be side stepped by these emerging African nations as a matter of fact, human necessity,and living reality. With regards to the economic development of these emerging African nations, their take off stage has to be side stepped. They cannot or are not to count one before two. They must jump one and count two, but can they even count or be allowed to count two? This question leads us to another

perenial problem of African political development and human communication or human take-into-accountabilities and susceptibilities.

Colonialism vs. Nationalism

Behind the heels of missionaries, slave dealers and western European slave and commodities' traders and explorers in and around Africa were colonialists. Some came under various cloaks, pretences, and camouflages. One of these was the so called missionary zeal to "christianize" Africans in Africa. Having been succesful in "christianizing" Africans in the various European and American continents to be docile slaves, the zeal to "christianize" Africans in Africa was overwhelming. So the colonialists, with the efficient use of their agents, effectively deprived those Africans in Africa from counting two. Slavery was replaced, this time in these African countries, with its effective euphemism--colonialism. Africans in Africa started laboring and producing goods and capital for exports to the home countries of their colonizers. The main difference between slavery and colonialism was that in slavery, the Africans were used to produce the goods of their masters, for their masters; whereas in colonialism Africans were made to produce African goods and wealth in Africa for the use, enjoyment, and hoarding of their colonial masters and their offspring or beneficiaries.

In most European countries as well as in the Americas, the production and accumulation of wealth by nationals of these countries and their African slaves had stimulated a strong spirit of nationalism; the need and desire to excel other nations. There was a spirit of national interests and competition--the development of a sense of belonging rather than a spirit of rejection, frustration, and introvertism, whereas the Africans were subjected to fear and intimidations at home and abroad, fright was all they could talk to themselves about. Self reliance, the primary force necessary for political development and the unique ingredient of man talking to himself, was a matter of hope not a reality. On the contrary European nationalism was substantive since there was enough wealth accumulated and enough personnel and psychological resources to stimulate strong national consciousness and internal competition. Nationalism in their case was not a vain struggle for a small piece of their own pie, but was a need and desire, not only to preserve their cherished wealth, but to increase and multiply it by robbing Peter to pay Paul. Even in today's world, African nationalism, on the other hand, has been and still is a continuous fight for shallow political or even representative power. It has been, and still is, a struggle to establish a token base from which they may start to operate towards national and political development--a need that has been made belated by factors beyond their control. Most of them

have achieved this shallow base only to find out that they either cannot have an operational base for political and national development, or that the stages of development in other parts of the world have made it impossible for them to operate towards their own interests and development. At this juncture people may observe that colonialism is dead or almost completely dead in Africa. Truly, colonialism may have died in most parts of Africa. However, the real fact is that it has not died. Rather, it has undergone a progressive metamorphosis to a type that may now be christened technology. Technology to me is a more domineering colonialism--an octopus that bars African political development and real national independence and integration. This is our other problem.

Technology and Political Development

Max Weber in his examination of the capitalist economic activity introduces a concept that he calls "rationality". He sees rationalization as the extension or expansion of areas of the general society within its bounds of rational decision, and the industrialization of social labor which makes available the criteria of instrumental action for the penetration of other areas such as urbanization, technification of transport and communication, etc. Thus we can say that "the progressive 'rationalization' of society is linked to the institutionalization of scientific and technical development. To the extent that technology and science permeate social institutions and thus transform them, old legiti-

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mizations are destroyed."[3] How can old legitimizations be destroyed at this stage in the emerging African countries which probably have had no chance to step on the first rung of the ladder that may take them two flights further to this stage of techonological development? This question can even be made un-necessary if one accepts the fact that technification of a social system even within the confines of a purposive rational-action has its profound political weight and substance which are aimed at institutionalizing domination.

Thus these African nations find themselves almost perpetually dominated. They are moving, one may say with some acceptable degree of exaggeration, from a political frying pan into a political fire. Technology, or lack of technology in these emerging African countries, keeps them in a position either as bad as that of the pre-colonial or colonial times, or even worse.

> Today domination perpetuates and extends itself not only through technology but as technology, and the latter provides the great legitimation of the expanding political power, which absorbs all spheres of culture...Technological rationality thus protects rather than cancels the legitimacy of domination...[4]

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[3]Jungen Habermas, Towards A Rational Society, Beacon Press, Boston, 1968, p. 81.

[4]Ibid.

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Where do we go from here, especially if the so called organs of mass communication are also technological realities? Whereas the prupose of this paper is not to paint a picture of an inescapable trap that these emerging African countries have found themselves in, it is however meant to emphasize the fact that the only way these African countries can get out of the trap is to recognize the existence of these realities, take them into account, and become susceptible to them enough to act on them and reassess their approaches and priorities towards political and national development. I would also hope that the consciences of the now developed or technologically saturated superpowers will be aroused to help rather than further enslave these so called underdeveloped or developing nations.

Some people have suggested that these developing countries of Africa and those of the so called third world, jump at once to a stage of communication technology that is operating in the so called developed nations today. One may ask, for whose good? Have the minds of men in these emerging countries been adequately prepared to stand such a jump? Can there be a succesful technological advancement if there has not been a basic psychological, mental, as well as social advancements? Can communication be facilitated without an obsession for a technological catch up and its inevitable back-lash of a more dominant subjugation or enslavement? My suggestion is that these emerging African countries are

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in the business of developing political ~~and~~ or communication realities for the utmost good of most of their citizenry, and if such communication realities are to enhance national integration, then the zest to catch up with the rest of the world in luxurious consumer technology should come secondarily to the zest to catch up with themselves in the development of life sustaining and enriching technologies, as well as technology for national cohesion and political unity and maturity. Technology for building good roads, ensuring quick and safe transportation of goods and services amongst the citizenry may be more necessary than military technology and sophisticated and exhorbitant investment in satellite communication for intercontinental or international use, while people within these countries find it impossible to talk to each other within short reasonable distances or travel safely along comparatively short distances. Nationalism should lead to internationalism and not the reverse.

One of the major problems of these emerging African countries is that they spend just all of their left over economic resources in purchasing at unreasonable rates, technological goods that they least need at this stage at their emergence, from their detractors, to their continous economic, social, and political detriment. The rich get richer. The poor continue to be poorer even when what made the rich richer came originally from, and to some extent still comes from the poor. (Eg. the development of the

U.S. space and other communication and technological development would not have been entirely possible without the copper from the Union Mines of the Congo, the same copper that led to the civil war in Congo and the death of its nationalist leader--Patrice Lumumba). It would not be unreasonable to say that advancement and/or development should not mean a crazy craving for technology. This may adversely affect the structural set up of these countries. Communication process that lends itself to useful political development and national integration would articulate this fact. Such a communication feat must make people aware of the fact that

> what characterizes the passage from traditional society to society commencing the process of modernization in NOT that structural modification of the institutional frame-work is necessitated under the pressure of relatively developed productive forces, for that is the mechanism of evolution of the species from the very beginning. What is new is a level of development of the productive forces that makes permanent the extension of subsystems of purposive-rational action and thereby calls into question the traditional form of the legitimation of power.... Thus on the base of market economy political domination can be legitimated henceforth 'from below' rather than 'from above' (through the invocation of cultural tradition.)[5]

Religious Malnutrition

Another problem of communication in the development of politics in the emerging African nations is the residual

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[5]Ibid., p. 96-97.

but influential effect of what I choose to call religious malnutrition. Religion has a very influential effect and/or impact in the political development of any and all nations. History vindicates this fact. The capitalist political ideology of the United States and of many Western European countries has its roots in Puritanism. Orthodoxy has influenced the political concepts and practices of the Russians and Greeks. Hinduism and Islam have influenced the political concepts and practices of the Indians and Asian countries. Confucianism finds expression in Maoism, or what you may want to call the Chinese brand of Communism.

Within the African nations or in the African continent, the setting is different. Not only were most if not all of the African countries colonized through the instrument of Christianity, but these Africans were also coerced out of their religious beliefs. They were taught to accept "an inferior position that was designed for them by God." Morevoer, multiplicity of religious beliefs owing allegiance to foreign potentates set in to displace African totemism or spiritual animism. Elements of society subscribing to these foreign religious beliefs put their allegiance to those religious authorities over that of their religion and hence put their responsibilities to themselves and their nations least over those of the foreign powers. Religion therefore has had and in some cases still has a great fragmentary effect on the political life of most African nations.

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These various religious bodies created more problems in Africa with their teachings. Not only was submission to God and His agents on earth--the missionaries--an ideal and an enforced religious belief, it was made, too well, a Christian practice. Christianizing the Africans meant rigorously subjugating them. Good Christians were those who accepted without questioning, and who proselytized with equal zeal, the teachings of the missionaries, by subverting their nations and fellow nationals.

For a communication situation to exist that will enhance political development, citizens and leaders of these emerging African nations must learn ~~presently~~ soon to separate religion from politics. They must unlearn the politics of religious fanaticism and practice that of political pragmatism. They must appreciate the fact that some traditions need to exist and persist if values that lead to cohesion are to be developed and propagated. These malnurished Africans must be fed, through the instrument of effective and realistic communication, with a new type of religious and political menu that emphasizes sovereignty and pride, service instead of serfdom, humility instead of indignity. All forms of ideological ~~alienisms~~ concepts e.g. herrenvolk egalitarianism, must give way to a new concept and practice of Africanism.

There are other problems of communication and political development in the emerging African countries

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which are not uncommon to many other countries of the world. Such problems which include literacy, languages, urbanization, and poverty have been covered by such eminent scholars as William Hachten, Lerner, Schramm, and many others. These problems could be more easily solved should the complexes posed by the above mentioned perenial problems be removed or cleared. For instance, illiteracy in many African countries involves inabilities by the so called illiterates to read and write foreign languages--English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, because of a multiplicity of the languages spoken in many African countries. Many Africans can read their own native languages and there is no reason why communicators, who are genuinely interested in the political development of their own countries, cannot first try to reach the populace at their own level of communicational competence and through such a medium attempt to bring them up to higher and more perceptive levels. Although there is a great need to improve literacy we must not loose sight of a basic communication fact that people are motivated to learn if they satisfy a basic need through learning. Improvement of the literacy rate may best begin with the ~~improvement~~ achievement of the basic needs of these people.

As previously mentioned, many African countries, if not all, have a multiplicity of languages and dialects. These languages and dialects present basic communication and/or political problems. These however can be solved.

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It is interesting to note that some of the developed countries of the world (as they are called), like Russia, also have multilingual groups, but these do not seem to impede their political development. These language groups not withstanding, as a matter of fact, these nations have established communication and technological feats as well as political cohesiveness that have broken language barriers and enhanced national integration. If the African nations attempt to and do present their multilingual citizens with some basic and popularly identifiable concept and an operational and useful political reality, language may no longer pose divisional and/or communicational problems.

Urbanization may be the other important problem of these emerging African nations. The Urban regions of many African countries, following the examples of the colonial setting, have continued to serve as political, communicational, and administrative as well as the industrial life stations, or nerve wires, of these countries. This has led to the concentration of the intelligentsia mostly in the urban area, and to what I call the rural brain and man-power drain. It has also restricted the consumption of information by those in the rural areas that habitate a large population of the politically viable villagers. What these emerging nations of Africa need may not, in this case, be increased urbanization, especially when the technological know-how and the economic cost needed to carry out such an expensive

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program may not be easily available. Probably, de-emphasizing the city and recreating a lively, progressive, communicable and accessible village setting may provide some solution. It may also prevent these emerging nations from falling into the same problematic situation that may cost the so-called developed nations a handsome amount of money to clear up, viz: pollution. Rural electrification, rural housing projects, rural telecommunication, rural road construction, rural learning and communication centers, rural water supply and sewage systems, rural cooperative and agricultural enterprises, etc. may do more to enhance the quality of individual and group lives, foster communication, and stimulate healthy and cohesive political development--hence national integration. It is the job of well-meaning African communicators to suggest and articulate these things if they are to constructively contribute to the political development of their nations.

There are many other problems that can be expressed among those already mentioned above, but we must devote some time to attempting an answer to a perennial question: What type of communication or mass communication as it is popularly known will enhance political development and national integration in these emerging African countries? The answer to this question is not simple, but must be briefly attempted. Theoretical constructs need be put through practical applications to eliminate some basic

fallacies. Some suggestions have already been made at various points during the process of defining the above problems. What we need do now is to attempt to suggest in broad concepts what could be done to improve the situation. Let us look back on an attempt.

As we have earlier discussed here, recent studies of the mass media in relations to their functions within a society have emphasized greatly the propaganda aspects; their function and control. Developing nations are caught in a cross fire. These nations have the urge to develop and catch up with the developed nations but are hindered by criteria set up by these developed nations for the developing nations to abide by, or take into account. These criteria unfortunately were not taken into account nor were they used by these developed nations when they were in the process of development. Developing nations, then, are struggling from a rather uncomfortable situation, to develop national identity, take into account human values and human rights, which the now developed nations neither cared about nor took into account. They must grapple with the problem of lack of technology which the developed nations are using as a new means of exploitation, to replace their earlier gross human exploitation, prior to the age of technology. Playing a great role in the prardox of national development, especially for these developing countries, are the mass media. It becomes necessary therefore to think of some criteria for a

national communication system that can maximize the potential of its media in such a way that they positively contribute more effectively to the general economic, social, and political development of a country. Such criteria should include broadly (1) programs of mass education for political, social, and individual consciousness, (2) a program of legitimization of the national government, (3) a program of promoting, initiating,and sustaining healthy economic growth.

There is a complex but demanding relationship between the mass media and the social systems, in relation to nation building. The process of national development, if it is to be functional and successful, must first be geared towards the development of the minds and bodies of the people in the society as individuals and a social group. These two developments should take place at the same time--the mind along with the body. Citizens need be aware of all the ills and goods of the society they live in. They need to know as much as possible where they are and where they should be going from there. They need be aware of the world around them, their relationship to the other part of the world in which they are part of, and in which they function indirectly. They need to know too, that what is food for one may be poison for the other, but what is good for the goose is good for the gander. The sum total of these is political awareness by all in the society. A responsible mass media system for these developing nations must not only lay open to masses the available political systems,

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talk about them exhaustively to and with the people, but must also suggest which of the alternate systems available may best serve them and their situation. Then and then only should the media let the people decide or choose for themselves which of the systems they desire. One may ask, how can the media do this?

The mass media of these emerging African nations have been active all along in this direction. The difference is that instead of serving their national goals and working for the general good of the populace they represent, they have unconsciously been serving the needs of their political detractors. In most of these emerging African nations, the mass media have been involved in the dissemination and promotion of those aspects of life that are alien to their consumers, or are not part of their everyday experiences and cultural belingings. Thus, the media of these emerging countries engage themselves in the creation of a

> revolution of rising expectations. [They] create knowledge of desireable things faster than these things themselves can be produced. It is easier to bring in movies, newspapers,and radios than it is to bring in housing,automobiles, bicycles, and medical facilities. [But] like all revolutionary forces [the media] prepare men's minds for new desires more rapidly than those new desires can be satisfied.[6]

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[6]Ithiel De Sola Pool, "Communication and Development." Topic Issue No. 66, USIS. p. 4.

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Such activities of the media, well intended as they may be, do not help create positive political thinking amongst the citizens. The citizens soon become disillussioned with their government. They believe their government is doing nothing to meet their needs and cater ~~for~~ to their welfare. Instead of creating harmony, dissension becomes the rule. Demands soon exçede needs and aspirations overwhelm availabilities. A tug of war developes between the governments and their people with the government loosing, but the people losing more in the long run. It is the duty of the media of these emerging African nations to present to both the government and the people a balanced diet of information. The media therefore must be efficient enough to suggest to the government what approaches it should take for the common good of all, as well as suggest to the people how they should relate both to themselves and their government in order to further their political and national interests.

In many cases, locally made goods may be more useful and durable than imported goods. Riding bicycles for a few more years so that some money may be diverted towards some more pressing social and capital development may be better than the promotion of the sales of Pegout or Opel cars. Developing mass transit may be of greater national interest than the importation of luxurious cars etc. It will be the duty of responsible mass media systems of these

emerging African countries to put these things across to the people and government as accurately and persuasively as they can possibly afford to. Success in any or all of these suggestions demands social mobilization and collective responsibility.

Individuals may be politically aware as individuals but this awareness must gather social or collective momentum before any type of progress or achievement socially or politically could be realized. It becomes necessary for mass media systems and developing nations to propagate social norms aimed at promoting group consciousness and motivating the people collectively. When individuals take into account their inadequacies and adequacies and those of others and stand ready to make sacrifices for the good of most of the poeple most of the time, then the society can move as a unit towards national intergration. Leadership is not only available because individuals have been developed but receive popular followership because there is a group or social (collective) identity. The extent to which a reliable and identifiable cohesive society emerges depends on the reliability and dedication of the mass media system to the goals of social or mass positive education, for political, individual, and social awareness.

If values are sold but are not bought, then the process of acquisition is incomplete. To this end therefore, the mass media should try to legitimize the government whose

aims and purposes cater to the overall good of the people. Constructive criticism is one way of doing this. The other involves backing up and promoting the aims and purposes of the government. The role of the mass media at this stage is to convey to the people the political authority of the government while stimulating in them (the masses) a political identity. When this happens, the mass media become a representative of the polity not the society nor the government. Coercion is absent since common identification will result in the development of mass culture and mass purpose. When this stage of mass culture is reached, then the mass media serves the society rather than the polity since there has been a total integration of both forces in the society. With the establishment of national identity or legitimization of the government will come a free flow of feed-backs and constructive suggestions and/or criticism. This leaves the media free and unpartisan to report both what the government is doing and how the people see and appreciate what the government does, and above all what the people want.

One would probably think that at this stage the mass media system would have accomplished all their tasks. This, however, is not true especially with regards to the developing nations. In these countries or nations, the process of modernization or development have taken wrong orders. There are no urbanizations, no economic well being

or stability, and the society though integrated remains fragile! The mass media, having completed a structural integration have to complete also the developmental integration. To this end, the people have to be made aware of the need to pass through, not without hardship, stages of economic development. This will enable the people to turn their attention to national development and recognize how important it is to develop not only the self and the society but the units of both as a nation. The masses will then focus their attention on the process of national development with full knowledge of what it takes and what it costs, thus eliminating the fragility of an otherwise weak economic base that would have left the government and the nation susceptible to external and internal subtle forces.

A mass media system that has beaten the social infrastructure of a developing society, by providing a binding union probably through the efficient selling of common or desiirable norms, that transcend language and individual differences, provides the people with a common ideology and/or identity and there-by these nations with a common goal, is most likely to contribute to the political development of these emerging nations, their general economic, and social development, and above all to national unity and integration. Developing countries, in my own opinion, may have to follow this channel or adapt such a channel to suit their individual national situations. Catching

up or developing in an otherwise developed world, especially when most of our resources have been used to develop the rest of the world, demands some stringent discipline on the part of these developing nations. The mass media of the emerging African nations must have to articulate this to the people while acting also as a watch dog of the government for the good of the people. As de Sola Pool puts it: "media development cannot stand alone. If the media are to do more than add to frustration, they must be part of a program of sustained development."[7]

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[7] Ibid. p. 4.

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